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THE MUSICAL TIMES,

And Singing Class Circular.

NOVEMBER 1, 1868.

MUSICAL IGNORANCE.

BY HENRY C. LUNN.

So much has been written and said on musical knowledge in the present day, that it will be at least a novelty to direct our attention for awhile to musical ignorance. We are perfectly aware that this is an ungracious task, because it is the fashion of the hour to glorify the spread of music amongst the masses to such an extent, that the rule has almost blinded us to the fact of the innumerable exceptions which lie around us; but as we are of opinion that there is no particular merit in turning aside from a fact because it does not accord with a cherished theory, we run the risk of offending those musical optimists who believe in the widely-spread assertion that the educated classes in England are, as a rule, imbued with an abstract love of high art; and that a knowledge of the fundamental principles of music is becoming a recognised necessity of the day. If the first step towards the healthy diffusion of knowledge be really to ascertain the existing amount of ignorance, it is absolutely essential that the important facts to be gleaned in the daily life of an artist, should not be held back or distorted: and were it not for a few plain truths occasionally spoken out by those who dare to think for themselves, we should imagine not only that England is a musical nation (an assertion requiring some amount of qualification), but that we are surrounded by an atmosphere of art which is absolutely essential to our very existence. Let us examine into the facts. It will be, no doubt, in the recollection of our readers that when a small grant was made by Government, a few years ago, to the Royal Academy of Music, a discussion took place upon the matter in the House of Commons. Now, it is of course no slur upon any person that he should not possess positive knowledge on, or perhaps even care much for, any particular art; but it is most undesirable that he should assume the privilege of talking as if he did, more especially when what he says may materially affect the subject under discussion. On the occasion to which we have referred, one of the sapient remarks was, that if a sum of money were given to the Academy, the "organ-grinders" would be asking for a grant next; and who could say when the musical demands upon the Government might stop? Other equally intelligent speeches followed—each member who could raise a laugh at the expense of the art, had his say; and eventually five hundred pounds was hustled into the estimates, to be hustled out again at the first favourable opportunity.

Now, we should not have recurred to this circumstance were we not fully convinced that many of these legislators, when they happen to be present at a classical concert, form a portion of the very audience cited by the press as representing those enlightened music-lovers who sit through a composition three quarters of an hour long with the utmost pleasure and delight. In the "delicious last movement" of a Quartett, for instance, we are told that you "might have heard a pin drop;" and at the end there was a burst of applause. Most assuredly: for to our certain knowledge, during many of these beautiful move-

ments, those who are trying to go to sleep somewhat overbalance those who are trying to keep awake; and the former being rather the quieter, keep the others in profound silence; the burst of joy on the cessation of the sound, however, being of course equally shared in by both parties. It is very well to record the silence observed at these performances; but silence is not always attention; and even attention does not necessarily indicate comprehension. To enjoy the highest class of music, it is absolutely necessary that some knowledge on the subject should previously exist in the mind of the listener; and yet, in confirmation of our views, we feel convinced that about three-fourths of the audience at an orchestral concert are utterly ignorant even of the meaning of the words used to denote the kind of compositions to be performed. "My dear fellow," we once heard a victim say, who had been induced by his family to go to a Philharmonic Concert, "they tell me that I shall hear Beethoven's Symphony in C minor; but how can I enjoy it when I really do not know what a Symphony is, or what C minor means?" And yet, when this patient martyr sinks back in his sofa-stall in a state of proper drowsy endurance, we shall probably be informed by sanguine believers in the universal intelligence of the audience, that he was in a delirium of enjoyment at the beauty of the music. Again, if it were really true that the mass of the public is so highly educated in the art, how is it that the "ballad concerts," as they are termed, are crowded; and that the "royalty" songs (for the performance of which these entertainments are expressly instituted), should sell as fast as they can be printed? Is it that those who are capable of comprehending and enjoying the great compositions can also equally enjoy the small? That Beethoven, Claribel, and Mozart, can be introduced into their drawing-rooms, and be received with equal favour? We believe not. The truth is, that those who patronise the small, have not advanced to the comprehension of the large; for were works on a level with these "royalty" ballads produced in any other art, we have no hesitation in saying that they would be universally received by the educated classes either with apathy or contempt.

Let us ask, too, whether our opera-houses are mainly supported by the devotees of Art or Fashion? True it is that real music-lovers are to be found in various parts of the house at every representation of a sterling work; but the bulk of the audience is composed of mere idlers, who "go to the Opera" in the evening, as they go to Rotten Row in the morning, to see and be seen. In good society, it is as necessary to rent an opera-box as it is to rent a hunting-box; and to be in the right place at the right season, is a proof of your knowledge of the requirements of the station in which it has pleased Providence to place you. Should Art occupy any real place in your affections, it is rather the exception than the rule; and you will be gently tolerated by your friends as a fanatic, whose eccentricities, although inconvenient, are perfectly harmless. It is, indeed, an admitted fact, that our lyrical establishments in England could not be kept open for a single season were they only to be patronised by those who seek music for its own sake; in proof of which we find that the finest works are usually given on non-subscription nights, or perhaps kept back for the short series of performances at reduced prices, after the conclusion of the regular season. "I can't stand your fusty old Mozart" (said a young gentleman, in our hearing, at the Opera, one

night; "give me Verdi." And he had Verdi in all his glory, for the opera was *I Lombardi*.

Passing from the listening public to the performing public, can it be justly said that the experience of any artist confirms the fact so often advanced, that, as a rule, there is a rapidly increasing love for the highest class of musical compositions? Intelligent enthusiasts of course there are, and always have been, who are fully capable of appreciating and executing the works of the best masters; but the names of the pieces played and sung by the majority of our amateurs are to be found in the "recent list" of publications periodically issued from our music-shops. That there may be a certain amount of pleasure derived from the performance of these trifles (some of which are extremely fanciful and elegant) there can be little doubt; but it is as absurd to imagine that a healthy mental structure can be reared upon them, as that a healthy bodily structure can be reared upon sponge-cakes, jellies, and ice-creams: the love for, and comprehension of, the solid compositions of those who have written for the glory of the art must grow with the growth and strengthen with the strength of the young pianist; for those masters who are so unfortunately often called upon to begin with pupils who come to be "finished," will agree with us that the task is hard indeed to train the hand and mind of a pianist when both have for years been occupied in the attempt to illustrate showers of precious stones, fire and water, angels' wings, or the faint whisperings of a summer breeze.

It would be, of course, difficult, and indeed impossible, to predict how long it would take to preach these truths before a revolution might spring up, which should have for its object the destruction of all the idols which have for such a length of time been so universally worshipped: but we are not of opinion that such a result is at all desirable; for, like all other impulsive revolutions, the re-action would be worse than the state of things which it seeks to replace. A style of composition might prevail, in which light, sparkling melody, and brilliancy of passage-writing, should be carefully banished; and we might be plunged into a reign of musical Puritanism, in which a performer who threw off a graceful and elegant little piece, or a vocalist who indulged in a *bravura* song, would be frowned upon by artistic pedants as if some actual crime had been committed against respectable society. What we would particularly desire to enforce is the necessity of gradually inculcating a love of music, as a language in which can be eloquently expressed the deepest and most poetical feeling; and it would then be easy to prove to a student that works embodying this view of the art—as in literature and painting—lie beyond those which are merely produced for the gratification of the multitude. This, however, brings us to the second branch of our subject, for we are now speaking not of the learners, but of the teachers.

It has long been a noteworthy fact that English literary men have, as a rule, shown themselves utterly ignorant of the subject of music. In the works of the authors of the last century, whenever the art is mentioned, it is usually treated with contempt; and occasionally musical terms are utterly mis-applied, with a recklessness implying the desire of parading a want of knowledge which, in any other art or science, would be considered disgraceful. Coming more to our own times, we find that, although any positive information on the matter appears quite unneces-

sary, there is a more general desire to show a sympathy with the science; and, in the present day, we may almost say that music appears recognised by authors as a very important element in our social enjoyments. But although the claims of the subject appear to be more generally admitted, we do not find that the knowledge of it has increased: on the contrary, we are continually condemned to read articles touching upon music, which show not only that the author does not understand his subject, but that he considers it quite superfluous to seek for information from those who do. As one case, out of many we could cite, let us mention an article, written by a man whose pen was ever ready in the cause of charity, urging the claims of a celebrated horn player, who was unfortunately incapacitated from following his profession. Beautifully sympathetic as was this appeal, and admirable as it was in literary merit, the failure was signal when music had to be mentioned. "Who does not remember," it said (we quote from memory), "the exquisite horn of this well-known player in Handel's 'Let the bright Seraphim?'" Again, in our facetious contemporaries, why will they not let music alone, unless they know something about it? To make a successful joke upon an art it is necessary to understand it; and then the artist will join with the public in the laugh. Good humoured satire upon any art or science may be always enjoyed, but then it must not be born of ignorance: if these periodicals will joke upon the art, they should keep a comic musician on the establishment.

Literature exercises an important influence upon the masses; and when mentioning teachers, we have commenced with those whose office it is to supply the wants of the reading public, because we know that the tone assumed by them in their works has a material effect in aiding or retarding the healthy progress of a science; and it is, therefore, highly desirable that they should set the example to those whom they address of understanding a subject before they talk of it. With regard to the Professors of the art, who assume the responsible post of directly forming the taste of those pupils who are entrusted to them, there can be no question that some day public attention must be drawn to the absolute necessity of establishing some system by which duly qualified teachers shall be known, and their position firmly established, by a diploma granted by a competent tribunal of Professors. To approach the subject of ignorance amongst those who are themselves the teachers, becomes indeed a difficult matter; yet we cannot blind ourselves to the fact that it is unjust to blame the pupil for faults which can be traced directly to the master. Innate musical feeling, we admit, is rare; but all who study the pianoforte have four fingers and a thumb upon each hand; and if the teacher do not train these fingers and thumbs according to the received theories of the best pianoforte masters, we should like to know what can be the value of his lessons? Yet do we find pupils, who have been for years under a master, vainly plunging and struggling through a difficult Fantasia, "de Salon," who have never played a single scale, and are utterly unacquainted with even the rudimentary exercises for the formation of the hand. These are facts—indisputable facts—and not matters of opinion.

With regard to the cultivation of the musical taste, as we have before said, we believe that it should be attempted gradually; and that the pupil should be rather led to the good music, than driven from the

bad. In all cases, however, it is absolutely necessary that the intelligence should be awakened; and that the student should be taught to think, especially on the reasons for the rules which are given for phrasing and accent. We especially dwell upon this, because we have often met with cases where some of Beethoven's Sonatas have been passed through in a mechanical manner, as a mere task, and afterwards stored up in a conspicuous place, as so many trophies of victory. Indeed, in one instance, we recollect that we heard a young lady estimate these Sonatas according to their money value. She had learned (she said) a two-and-sixpenny one; but her eldest sister had just got a four-shilling one; she was perfectly enchanted with the "Sonata pathétique," because it cost three-and-sixpence.

That musical ignorance is widely spread there can be little doubt; but it must be recollected that with a listener it is passive, and harmless; but with a teacher it is active, and dangerous. The necessity of securing efficient musical instructors, therefore, cannot be too strongly urged upon the public; and if some guarantee of competence were to be in all cases demanded, we are convinced that the result would be beneficial. An examination of the pupils at most large educational establishments is rigorously insisted upon; but if, occasionally, an examination of the masters were to be instituted, there can be little doubt that many instances of apparent incapacity on the part of the learners, might be more justly traced to real incapacity on the part of the teachers.

ROYAL ITALIAN OPERA.

A SHORT Autumn season of Italian Opera was opened by Mr. Mapleson on Saturday, the 24th ult. The opera selected was *Lucrezia Borgia*, a work too well known to need a word of comment, especially as the principal characters were sustained by Madlle. Titiens, Madame Trebelli, Mr. Santley, and Signor Mongini. The house was very full; and their Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Wales were present. On the following Monday, Madlle. Minnie Hauck, the young American vocalist, made her *débüt* as *Amina*, in *La Sonnambula*. Her voice is a pure and light soprano, and her execution thoroughly correct and under control. With the audience her success was most decisive; and we need scarcely say that she was compelled to bow her acknowledgments after each act for the unbounded applause with which she was greeted. Signor Mongini sang well throughout the somewhat lackadaisical part of *Elvino*, and Signor Tagliafico ably replaced Mr. Santley (for whom an apology was made on the score of indisposition) in the part of the Count.

CRYSTAL PALACE.

THE Saturday Concerts have, as might be anticipated from the excellent announcement issued at the commencement of the season, proved most attractive. Volkmann's "Fest-Overture," performed at the first Concert, is weak and ineffective; and Wagner's "Meistersinger" March, on the following Saturday, produced little effect. Herr Hager's Concert Aria, and Herr Reinecke's "Prelude to the fifth act of *King Manfred*," however, contain points of much interest; and credit must be given to Mr. Manns for presenting them so carefully to his audience. The third Concert was a treat to all the lovers of Mendelssohn; for the whole of the music at present known as having been composed to Herr Geibel's libretto, *Loreley*, was performed entire, including "A Vintage Song," which was given for the first time. We need scarcely say that this little gem, written solely for male voices, is a model of purity in melody, and of simplicity in construction, the pastoral character being admirably preserved throughout.

It pleased the audience so decisively as to be enthusiastically encored. The "Ave Maria," we have already mentioned, on its performance at one of the Concerts of Mr. Joseph Barnby's Choir. The solo was well sung by Madame Rudersdorff (in spite of her indisposition, which compelled Mr. Grove to claim the indulgence of the audience), and the soprano chorus, supposed to be heard in the distance, was delicately given; although much of the dramatic effect intended by the composer must of course be lost in the concert-room. The *Finale*, which has now fairly become a stock piece, was received with the utmost favour; and to the credit of Madame Rudersdorff, it must be said that, even under such adverse circumstances, she exerted herself to the utmost in the brilliant soprano solo. Mendelssohn's Overture to *Melusine*, was played before the *Loreley* selection, and proved most effective and appropriate. Mr. Sullivan's part song, "Echoes," performed for the first time, was scarcely done justice to by the choir; but enough of its merit was developed to make us long for a second hearing.

AGRICULTURAL HALL.

THE Concerts at this establishment have been crowded during the past month. Classical nights have been sparingly introduced, when the *Messiah*, *Elijah*, the *Creation*, &c., have delighted the few, at the expense of the many. As a rule, however, the programmes have been strangely mixed—containing music of a good school, of a bad school, and of no school at all—founded, we presume, upon the experience of what is most attractive to a general audience. We are willing to admit that, as monetary success is the most important result of these Concerts, much concession to popular taste may be necessary; but we regret to see the old Jullien time revived, because we believed (and still believe) that the taste for such a class of entertainment has passed away. The Quadrille, called "The Fall of Magdala," with "military effects" makes us tremble to think what may be the next step in this direction; especially as the martial spirit has been appealed to by admitting volunteers in uniform at half price. May not a "Quadrille," descriptive of the celebrated Riot in Hyde Park, be prepared, with grand "police effects," admitting, of course, members of the "force" at a reduced rate? As the "Magdala" Quadrille has been dedicated to Lord Napier, the "Hyde Park" Quadrille should be dedicated to Sir Richard Mayne.

A Concert was given in the Lower Hall, Exeter Hall, on Monday evening, the 26th ult., by the Choir of St. Michael's Church, Burleigh Street, assisted by Miss Poole, Miss Marie Leaford, Miss Kate Bartlett, Miss Emily Thomson (piano), Mr. Wilbye Cooper, and Mr. H. Dimmock Hill (clarinet). Miss Poole sang, "Speak, for thy servant heareth" (W. H. Weiss), and "My soul is dark" (T. Davenport Chatterton), the latter being accompanied on the harp by Mr. J. Balsir Chatterton. Miss Marie Leaford gave "Angels, ever bright and fair," and a song by West, "Sweet Bird." Miss Kate Bartlett, though suffering from nervousness, sang the two songs allotted to her—"Come unto Him" (*Messiah*), and "Penelope at her task,"—with considerable effect. Mr. Wilbye Cooper gave "If with all your hearts" (Mendelssohn), and "The long waves come and go" (Gabriel), with his usual ability. Miss Emily Thomson played Beethoven's Sonata in A flat, with Funeral March. The Choir performed several choruses and part-songs very creditably. Mr. J. Turle Lee accompanied, and Mr. Edward Craig conducted. The Concert was given in aid of the Church Organ Fund.

On Friday, the 9th ult., the remains of the Rev. Ernest Hawkins were interred in the cloisters of Westminster Abbey, when the choir, under the able direction of Mr. Turle, sang the appointed portions of the service; and Goss's anthem, "Brother, thou art gone before us," to Dean Milman's words, was performed.